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Cover Page Footnote

This article is from an earlier iteration of *Diálogo* which had the subtitle "A Bilingual Journal." The publication is now titled "Diálogo: An Interdisciplinary Studies Journal."

ANGELIKA BAUER

Artist Profile

By Bethania Stewart

Reprinted article from REVUE
(Guatemala's English-language Magazine)

Few speak the vocabulary of creation and transformation in such bold shapes as artist Angelika Bauer. Evolving and changing, her own life beats at the heart of her work. "I was criticized a lot by 'real artists,' let's say, that my work is very commercial and too nice, and Guatemala has a lot of problems politically, and how could I continue to do this kind of work? She said. "I always felt I wanted to show strong women, not suffering women. We see a lot of suffering women on the news. I thought it was important that the women went through suffering and hard times and maintained their strength. That's what I wanted to show, not the 'weak Indian,' beaten down and oppressed."

Trained as an illustrator and graphic designer, Angelika arrived in Guatemala for the first time in 1977, accompanied by a Guatemalan filmmaker she had met in Germany. "We sent a Volkswagen camper from Holland by boat to Canada and drove down through the United States and Mexico. When we left Guatemala we sold the truck and bought the land on the lake. I got married here in 1978, and returned to Germany to work for enough money to build a house," she said. It would be three years before she returned in 1981, to war and violence.

Originally from Dusseldorf, her first Guatemalan home was in Santiago, Atitlán. "When I arrived, what I really liked was the earthiness of the indigenous people. At that time I came from an alternative background, going back to nature and doing things from scratch." In Santiago, "people built their own houses, they made their own *Cayucos*, the women wove, their *petate* beds came from the very reeds that were once the nests of birds. It was these close ties to nature, the autonomous and self-sufficient style of living that attracted me the most. I realize now that it was a little bit romantic to look at indigenous life in such a way. But I was quite young then."

She began creating "ethnographic illustration, explaining all the artistic, craft and farming processes of Santiago—*petate*

weaving, avocado production, plant life, textiles, canoe building—and they sold in my show at the *Museo Ixchel*."

In 1983, she started a scholarship program in Santiago, with a little help from German friends. "Through that I focused more on the indigenous women who helped me with the program." She continues with the program today.

Her first book, "*Xocomil*," was published in 1985. "Since I come from an illustrative background, I always had the idea that it would be nice to illustrate books. I looked in the archives in Guatemala City for stories that had to do with the lake and I found the *Xocomil* story. I don't think it's a traditional story, it looks like it's a folktale written by a foreign woman who lived in Guatemala, but it fit very well and I liked that," she said. "I made a series of originals and silk screens which showed in the city."

Freer, more colorful "*Mujeres Tzutujiles*" followed, a joint project with Vincent Stanzione, her husband. "I made the illustrations first and then he wrote the poetic text. It's about women's work." The book is dedicated to women, and especially the widows of Santiago, Atitlán.

"Looking at the indigenous woman's life—very earthy, doing everything on the ground, weaving there, making the tortillas—from that earthiness I started finding my own femaleness. We had a show titled '*Nosotras*'. It became more like a spiritual experience for myself," she said. "From there I moved into a more general, cosmic feeling of the female side of life and a cosmic female understanding. From that came '*Madres Creadoras*,' with poetry to express something more global that every women can share."

The life and work of North American painter Georgia O'Keefe (1887-1986) has also played a role in Angelika's transformation. "I like her work a lot. When I read her biography I felt a lot of similarities between her life and my life, and the way I like to live. I can be very asocial, not needing



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Awakens Us to the Abundance of Cosmic Forces,
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May We Appreciate Our Capacity for Joy and Laughter,
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We Heal Our Mother Earth.**

**La Celebración De La Vida
Despiertanos A La Abundancia De Las Fuerzas Cósmicas,
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Angelika Bauer

to see people or be around people for inspiration, not needing to go to opera or concerts or shows. I like to live like an ascetic too. I don't have a TV or a big CD collection," Angelika explained. "O'Keefe was criticized a lot during the Depression and during a lot of political difficulties for continuing to do flowers. But that was what she wanted to do. I think you have to be truthful to your own need of expression. Political activity might not be in the art gallery. Even though you think you might reach the Establishment, which sometimes you do, I don't think they go home and make these changes."

While Angelika's art may not be political, aspects of her private life are. She and Vincent, with private donations, have been building houses for many people in the Highlands, where they have lived for the past six years.

Moving from Lake Atitlán to the Highlands took courage. "Though I worked all those years in Santiago and it was perfect place to create, I had to move away from it so I could change. I wanted to move toward something that was not so gender oriented. That was difficult because I didn't want to have human beings in my pictures either. I want to do something beyond gender. In a different environment it's a good chance to change, but it didn't happen very fast. I was struggling with that," she said.

The changes kept coming. Last year, Angelika worked hard illustrating Vincent's book "Rituals of Sacrifice," but still felt frustrated not to be able to return to a more creative artwork. "Sometimes not being creative is really heavy because you fall into this big nothing kind of floaty state of existence. If you can accept this, it's nice. Sooner or later one's creativity returns. I started working again this year and I'm very happy with what I'm moving toward. It's not the earthy colors any more. I'm

working in a different color range, moving up the charkas, more yellow, green, blue and the tones in the middle like turquoise."

Recently, Angelika has been collaborating with Luisa Wheeler on an Antigua cookbook to be published in the near future. It will be sold to raise money for several charities. Hopefully, there will be new posters out soon as well. "I continue with the posters because this is how we make our living," she said. "One side of myself is seeing to this and the other side is opening myself to deeper expressions of creativity."

Experience is like drawing without an eraser. Experience comes with age—which is the time it does you the least good. Some people speak from experience, while others, from experience, don't speak. Experience is always worthwhile: if it doesn't keep you from making the same mistake twice, at least it keeps you from admitting it twice.